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ABSTRACT

The author describes the structure and methodology of "educational criticism" and provides excerpts from a study done in a high school art history class. Educational criticism is based on lengthy classroom observations and describes, interprets, and evaluates classroom life. The educational critic must be knowledgeable about classrooms and the subject matter and must be able to compare what she observes with other educational possibilities. The first stage, field observation, combines formal and informal methods which include direct classroom participation and observation, interviewing, document analysis, and systematic counting. The second stage consists of writing the criticism, which includes description, interpretation, and evaluation, judgment, or assessment. Description, the major part of the documentation, includes setting and events of typical days and reflects changes which occurred in the classroom. Interpretation, which focuses on the whole and on parts of the observation, is based on educational and social science theories. The evaluation stage answers the questions "Was it done well?" and "Was it worth doing?" Prescription, or "How could it be done better?" may also be included. (Author/KC)

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AN EDUCATIONAL CRITICISM OF THREE ART HISTORY CLASSES: A DISCUSSION OF THE METHODOLOGY

A Paper Presented at
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Introduction.

This afternoon I will discuss the methodology called educational criticism and share excerpts from one example, thus indicating how educational criticism, based on the paradigm of the arts, copes with problems of extended classroom interaction and its description. After describing my substantive issues briefly, I will sketch the background of educational criticism and connoisseurship and relate its functions to the classroom scene. Then I will discuss the process of fieldwork on which the study rests. Finally, I will describe the descriptive, interpretive, and evaluative aspects of educational criticism.

The background of art history in high schools.

In analyzing the structure of art for teaching and learning, Barkan (1965) suggested a tripartite structure: (a) the expressive domain or the making of art, (b) the critical domain or talking about art, and (c) the historical-cultural domains of art. In American high schools art expression or studio art has long held a place; the critical domain has gained some recognition; and the historical-cultural domain has entered the art curriculum in the form of art history or art appreciation. Still offered in a small (but increasing) number of high schools, art history courses have been inadequately researched and evaluated. The scope of this inadequacy encompasses both the dearth of research and the lack of methodology capable of dealing

adequately with the complexity of the art history classroom. In an effort to add both to the body of research and to the methodology, I conducted a study, the substantive focus of which is art history teaching and learning in high schools. Today's talk is a report on the structure and methodology of that study. Focusing on substantive issues first, I identified four aspects of art history teaching and learning as "foreshadowed problems" in Malinowski's terms (Malinowski, 1922). These are (1) curriculum organization, (2) pedagogy or teaching methods, (3) content breadth, and (4) content depth. These four were designated "formal properties" during the study. After preliminary analysis and fieldwork, I located three art history classes and spent one semester observing in the three classrooms. Subsequently I wrote lengthy commentaries--classroom portrayals--in the form of educational criticism. This outline, of course oversimplifies the substantive issues, but gives you an idea of the nature of the study.

The assumptions of educational criticism. The second focus of my study is the development, utilization, and assessment of a methodology for educational research based on the paradigm of the arts rather than on the paradigm of the sciences. From the artistic paradigm we draw forth the tools of aesthetic criticism and adapt them to educational research. Aesthetic criticism (of cinema, books, theater, and television, e.g.) describes, interprets and evaluates

works of art and helps educate the perception of the reader. Likewise, educational criticism can help sensitize an educator to possibilities he or she has never before considered. If we assume teaching is an art form, as many do (for instance, Highet, 1950; Axelrod, 1973; Greer, 1974; and Eisner, 1963, 1975, and 1976), we may consider applying the methods of aesthetic criticism to teaching. Educational criticism is the name we give to such a research methodology. Educational criticism can be defined as a controlled form of inquiry which is based on lengthy classroom observation and which takes the form of critical portrayal of classroom life. The inquiry must be based on the researcher's "educational connoisseurship"--a knowledge of the possibilities and alternatives in education which allows the critic to see, relate, illuminate, and render the classroom scene (Greer, 1974; Vallance, 1975; and Eisner, 1974, 1976). In other words, the critic must be knowledgeable about classrooms, classroom life, and the subject or subjects being taught; she must also be able to compare and contrast what she sees, hears, and observes with and to other educational possibilities. The educational critic must be an educational connoisseur--the Jack Shelton of the classroom rather than of the souffle and service in the San Francisco bistro.

The fieldwork stage of educational criticism. The first stage of educational criticism--field observation--necessarily precedes the written commentary stage. In this study the fieldwork stage is based primarily on participation

observation methodology. Four months time was spent observing in three art history classrooms in high schools. The four "formal properties" mentioned earlier--curriculum organization, pedagogy, curriculum breadth, and curriculum depth--provided the initial substantive focus. Other issues which evolved through the observational process were added as they emerged. In field work, the observer discovers the phenomena (plural) according to the needs of the classroom at hand. This is not to imply that prior fieldwork may not have been done in art history classrooms--in my case, it had. But in order not to miss the key issue in a given classroom, considerable latitude is allowed the researcher. In one classroom "modeling" emerged as the major focus to which the formal properties were related during the commentary period; in a second, classroom lecture style, and in a third, the conceptual nature of art presented similar foci. A host of sub-issues emerged from the observations as well. Ultimately, the three classes were checked for the presence or absence of certain pedagogical events, certain types of interaction and several qualities of subject matter which were suggested by incidents in one or another of the classrooms.

The discussion thus far has centered on the conceptual baggage we carry into a classroom and some of the same we acquire while in the classroom. I will now shift my attention to the participant observation process--defining it and doing it. The participant observation technique suffers

from what Pohlan[4] (1971) calls "an absence of consensus about its nature." McCall and Simmons (1969) recognized the dilemma and defined the technique as follows:

> [a] characteristic blend or combination of methods and techniques...which involve[s] some amount of genuinely social interaction in the field with the subjects of the study, some direct observation of relevant events, some formal and a great deal of informal interviewing, some systematic counting, some collection of documents, and artifacts, and open-endedness in the direction the study takes (p. 1)

Another term for this same technique is "the field study" or simply, "field methods"--a term that derives from the naturalistic setting of the study, as opposed to the laboratory. Schwartz and Schwartz (1955, re-printed 1969) emphasize the interaction and flexibility aspects of the participant observation technique as they discuss:

> a process in which the observer's presence in a social situation is maintained for the purpose of scientific investigation. The observer is in a face-to-face relationship with the observed, and by participating with them in their natural life setting, he gathers data. Thus, the observer is part of the context being observed, and he both modifies and is influenced by this context. The role of the participant observer may be either formal or informal, concealed or revealed; the observer may spend a great deal or very little time in the research situation; the participant-observer role may be an integral part of the social structure or largely peripheral to it (p. 91).

In my study of art history classrooms, participant observation is an open-ended blend of formal and informal methods which involve direct participation and observation in the milieu of the classroom, informant and respondent interviewing, some document analysis, and some systematic counting. The

open-ended aspect allows the researcher to enter the situation with an informal hypothesis or "foreshadowed problem." The blending aspect allows the researcher to use the techniques that seem appropriate for the class period, day or week. Since there is no set schedule, one can capitalize on events as they occur. The terms "informal" and "formal" suggest the unstructured quality of some events in contrast to the more structured quality of others. Informant and respondent interviewing, other aspects of this complex process, differ from one another. Informants are people from a setting whom the researcher requests to talk informally about the classroom ambience is, to tell what it is like when the researcher cannot be present, and to fill in the details of certain events. The respondent usually answers more formally structured questions--perhaps a written questionnaire. Both informant and respondent techniques are necessary and may overlap. One person may fill both roles, although at different times. Document analysis involves inspecting the handouts, tests, work sheets, vocabulary lists, etc. to analyze the data they provide about the missing pieces of information. Systematic counting involves choosing some element or event in the classroom and subsequently noting its frequency or absence. This blend of techniques in the participant observer process helps the researcher arrive at answers to questions about the puzzle of classrooms.

The questions that are asked in this type of research are not the same as those asked by most practioners

of the scientific paradigm. Perhaps the main question in this type of research is "What is the game and how can it be described?" as Erickson described it (Erickson, 1977). The questions come first; the methodology is only a tool in the endeavor.

The participant observation technique makes certain assumptions about the nature of man and the role man plays in his own reality. Primarily, the participant observer believes that the participant is to some degree aware of what is happening in his situation and maintains some degree of control over it. The participant has a set of terms to describe the phenomena with which he interacts and the life style that he leads. By joining the participants in their activity as well as observing, the researcher tries to reconstruct the reality that the participants construct for themselves. In this way the observer hopes to describe and interpret the situation more faithfully than an observer who does not participate. The philosophy of this technique is sometimes called constructivist and has been described fully by Magoon (1977). The emphasis in this research is on context and reconstruction of meaning from an insider's view. The context in which events happen plays an important role in the work of Hymes (1972), and Barker and Gump (1964).

During participant observation, I took notes on what happened during the event when possible or immediately afterwards when the events precluded note taking. Samples of

dialogue were included when possible. After each observation I spent several hours adding notes to the original oberva-tions. Sometimes Smith's "interpretive asides" were scribbled along with other notes (Smith, 1968). I later returned to these as a point of comparison for other days in the same classroom or for the comparison to another classroom scene. These notes were organized during the study and before writ-ing the educational criticism.

To summarize thus far, foreshadowed problems were brought with the participant observer to the three classrooms. Other issues were added while in these classrooms. The classrooms were observed over a period of time in which the ins and outs of classroom life were noted. An attempt to understand the context of the classroom was made.

Writing the Criticism

The second stage of educational criticism after obser:va-tion consists of writing the educational criticism--an analy-tical, metaphoric, and searching exercise. Although some writ-ing can occur during later stages of observation, most happens at a later date. The written commentary consists of descrip-tion, interpretation, and evaluation, judgment, or assessment. Another step--analysis--has been suggested by Smith (1968) and Feldman (1972). But their explanations of analysis lead me to believe that this could be subsumed under description and interpretation for practical purposes, especially "thick description" as Geertz (1973) uses the term. Although the

process of criticism may sound like a very orderly one, in practice the critic does not rigidly separate the functions. They intertwine and play off one another. One observation sparks description which leads to interpretation which prompts the critic to return to the situation with new thoughts and insights. One cannot simply jump to evaluation, however, without an adequate grounding in description and an exploration of interpretation. But the basic ingredients, whatever pattern they assume in the case at hand, remain fundamentally the same.

Description. Usually the educational critic begins the criticism with a passage of description. Description provides the major part of her documentation in educational criticism. The descritpion enriches the experience for the reader--it renders the qualities in the situation. By doing so the description helps sharpen the reader's perception about the classroom. The critic must choose passages that help build an image of what the experience was in the classroom. In other words, the description helps answer the questions "What is the game?" and "How is it played?" Mann (1969) explains how the critic makes choices:

> The critic discloses meaning by explaining design... And if choices are to be regarded in their artfulness, they must be regarded as chosen not for any extrinsic purpose but simply for what they themselves mean. To say what they mean, therefore, is to account for their being chosen. Their meaning is their reason for being chosen. Thus to account for the choices in a work of art is precisely to discover what the choices mean. Explanation of the design of choices and disclosure

> of meaning are logically identical, a single thing come at from opposite sides. When the relations among selections that constitute the designs of a curriculum have been explained, the meanings of the curriculum have thereby been disclosed (Mann, 1969, p. 30).

The critic makes choices about which description to include on an individual basis that indicates the uniqueness as well as the universality of the classroom. However, each educational criticism necessitates some description of the setting, the events of a typical day or a series of days. It also needs to reflect any major changes that happened over time in the classroom. Interpretation and evaluation cannot be separated too arbitrarily. Although each of my educational criticisms commences with description, short pieces of description are interspersed throughout the interpretive and evaluative passages.

I now would like to share with you a passage of description from "Mr. Jewel as a Model," one of the three educational criticisms from this study. In this passage I attempt to set the scene for the interpretation and evaluation that follow. These are the first paragraphs from one criticism and is a composite of a typical day.

"A Day"

> Quiet conversation between two teenagers on padded benches with stacks of books at their feet, and an air of relaxed expectation greets art history students who enter Mr. Jewel's class. The calmness enfolds them. Some scurry for seats on benches. Some unstack plastic chairs and place them in a semi-circle. One heads

for the big soft chair in the corner, and some recline on the carpeted floor with their heads supported on book packs. Quietly they chatter, half listening to the loudspeaker announcements. The comfortable room is crowded, but the students voted the first week of class not to move to a traditional classroom. The gallery with benches, carpets, a rack of art magazines, some display cases, and a changing monthly art show seemed more appropriate for art history than desks in a row in a traditional classroom.

Mr. Jewel emerges from the art office, which opens directly into the gallery. He wears comfortable clothes--a soccer shirt and jeans--and a comfortable smile. He talks to Randar, an Indian student, about Buddhism before the class begins. The cart with the audio-visual equipment sits by the door. The old-fashioned portable screen stands ready across the room. The middle and upper-middle class youngsters continue to chatter while Mr. Jewel takes roll and collects "Admits" (forms which explain an absence). Students who were absent for the preceding class collect missed hand-outs, or if the forms are buried in the office, must wait until after class.

"Okay, people, let's get ready for class," entreats Mr. Jewel in a soft, well-modulated voice, the tones of which whip around the space like pink sugar in a cotton candy machine. He repeats the agenda, usually once for an opener, and then reviews it quickly for late-comers and mind-drifters.

The calendar determines the length of the art history class. Mondays and Wednesdays the class lasts 1 hour and 35 minutes; Fridays it is 45 minutes. Mondays and Wednesdays the "break" around 10:30 or 10:45 interrupts the session and provides the students with a breath of fresh air, and usually, sunlight. Mr. Jewel uses this pattern to everyone's benefit.

Mr. Jewel tries to limit the "administrative business" to a short segment at the beginning of the period--usually lasting no longer than 7 to 10 minutes. He entreats his students to read their art history texts--Elsen's Purposes of Art (which presents art history content topically or thematically as opposed to chronologically)--so that they will get more out of the lectures and talks and do better on tests. Mr. Jewel inquires if everyone understands what they are reading. He explains that he will review the reading another way. And before commencing the content for the day, he asks the goofing-off Randy and Ian to join the group.

He begins with a rhetorical question--"What were images of gods?" Then he says, "We will look at three cultures only--ancient Greece, Buddhism (which didn't have that much effect on Western art and parallels Western art), and Christianity."

"Art is always," Mr. Jewel goes on, "a mirror of what people thought in the culture..Changes [are] reflected in art."

This concept, encompassing more than just a painter's style, demands that the teacher use examples from diverse cultures and eras. Since the content is images of gods--Greek, Christian, and Buddhist--the class leapfrogs through eras and millenia to see varied examples. "Today we will concentrate on Greek and Buddhist art," Mr. Jewel explains as he clarifies the agenda.

He launches into the first sub-concept of the day--Greek art was not just one period but several hundred years of "mini-periods" of different styles. Using his hands to trace the classic shapes on the screen, he begins to outline the "golden age" of Greek art. Mr. Jewel uses a series of questions--sometimes the same ones that he handed out on the study sheet for the chapter in Elsen's Purposes of

Art--to draw out factual information and opinions from students. The students demonstrate their familiarity with the material as one by one they join the answering group, almost a litany or a reaffirmation of beliefs.

Randar, an Indian student from Bombay, begins with a lucid explanation of the differences between Hellenic and Hellenistic art. When Randar answers that Alexander spread Greek art, Mr. Jewel repeats the name, "Alexander," and adds "Alexander the Great," with his voice on the upswing. Mr. Jewel outlines how Alexander conquered so much territory. He asks us to:

> imagine a big map of the Mediterrannean. And Alexander leaves generals in each place. When Alexander was killed, the generals grabbed for power, played musical chairs for power.

He goes on to explain that the conquered wanted "Greek-like things." Randar adds, "Salukas was a Greek who stopped at India," as he relates his own history to the content of the class.

When Vickie complains, "I can't understand the differences" [between Hellenic and Hellenistic art], Mr. Jewel shows her how subtle the difference really is as he points to illustrations in a book. After receiving a nod of recognition from her, he then tours the room with the book open to a page of Greek statues to show the others. "Hellenistic is much more life-like," he adds.

Mr. Jewel swings over to the next sub-concept, the concept of the ideal. Betty nominates Mark Spitz as her ideal. Mr. Jewel says even Mark Spitz probably has a wart somewhere. Inevitably a teenage boy interjects sarcastically, "probably between his ears." And everyone laughs.

As the laughter fades, the concept of the ideal

> remains the center of attention as the class moves to other sculptures. Mr. Jewel notes, "They [the Greeks] attempted to make perfect bodies. They were physical fitness nuts." A student adds, "The perfection indicates authority." Ian says, "They are interested in battle." Jan mentions, "They represented gods." Mr. Jewel asks, "What did the statues symbolize?" One student answers, "The healthy body--balance in all things was emphasized." We have been in class for twenty-five minutes now.

This concludes the descriptive passage that I chose to read. In the full length version of "Mr. Jewel as a Model" there are several more pages of description before moving into interpretation and evaluation. A descriptive passage from another educational criticism might be considerably more metaphoric as suggested by the title "The Art History Cosmic Image Bus--Mr. Wand, Our Tour Guide." Description helps the reader picture the classroom, the actions, the students, the teaching and the interaction.

Interpretation. The interpretive stage allows whole-part distinctions, intrinsic and extrinsic interpretation, and "thick description" which is a form of interpretation according to Geertz (1973). Whole-part interpretation involves shifting attention back and forth between the total scene and individual parts. It begins--this part-whole, whole-part dance--with our initial observation in fieldwork. We focus on wholes and then particulars. We move from subsidiary to focal awareness and back again in Polanyi's

terms (Polanyi, 1969). Back and forth--the interpretive cha-cha-cha we might call it. The interpreter must play with the parts and find the meaning they hold in the whole, remembering that the whole is also made up of the missing pieces as well as those that we see. Mr. Jewel's use of humor can be interpreted as poking holes into the over-serious veneer that often overlaps classrooms using the whole-part interpretation.

The second type of interpretation is "thick description." Geertz indicates a deeper level of description when he adopts Gilbert Ryle's term, "thick description," to describe the interpretative process in which he sees ethnographers engaged (Geertz, 1973). Essentially, Geertz suggests combining the descriptive and interpretive process in a synergistic manner in order to fathom the layers of meaning. It involves clarifying the meaning that the critical event holds for the participants. Mr. Jewel's organizational system may help the youngsters study better, but what does the repetition mean to certain students in the situation and how do they cope with it?

Interpretation in light of intrinsic and extrinsic theories allows the writer to avail herself of various theoretical stances which help render the interpretive scene. The theories whose roots are firmly in education I call "intrinsic theories;" those that I draw on from the social sciences and other fields I call "extrinsic theories." From educational or "intrinsic theories" we can enlist historical traditions such

as Progressivism, academic rationalism, or Summerhillian schooling, against which an educational scenario could be interpreted. Some theories of learning--stimulus-response, Piagetian, Deweyian, or humanistic--might help provide the clues for interpreting a classroom with certain features that suggest the appropriateness of the theory. "Extrinsic" or social sciences theories, such as communications theory, social learning theory, small group process theory, Freudian theory or Marxist theory, to name just a few available candidates, might be appropriate at some time or another--in some classroom or another. Usually one theory offers greater explanatory power. As Mann indicates, however:

> Clearly a single curriculum, like a single story, has many designs to be explained and thus many meanings to be disclosed, so that no single critique is exhaustive. The critic, therefore must be selective but in a very particular way (Mann, 1969, pp. 30-31).

Simon (1975) suggests (rather than says) that the critic must let the reader into the secrets of how she arrived at her position by revealing some of her thinking process as she goes along.

In "Mr. Jewel as a Model," the concept of modeling was used to interpret some of the actions of the teacher. Let me share with you the introduction to this section.

> Mr. Jewel's aims, as I perceive them, center on building skills in art history and then allowing students to use those skills in the role of art historians in a limited way. The first part of this twofold aim involves developing vocabulary, descriptive techniques, comparative techniques, and fluency with art historical concepts. The second part of the aim involves the student

> in doing what an art historian does as Bruner (1960) suggests when he speaks of the "child as physicist"; here the adolescent is an art historian. In his search to reach these aims, Mr. Jewel has developed a number of strategies which I group under the term "modeling." As I observed over time in the class, I became aware that in addition to "demonstrating" and "teaching," Mr. Jewel was also "modeling" how to deal with vocabulary, description, comparison, and fluency with art history concepts; he also was modeling how an art historian does art history--not by devoting his whole life to it as most art historians would, but by producing an image of serious, rational study of the art history content area.

After this introduction to the concept of modeling and after some discussion of modeling based on the work of Bandura (1962), I proceed to describe the process of modeling as seen in the classroom, drawing on supportive descriptions drawn from observations.

Evaluation. The evaluation stage of educational criticism is mainly normative. We try to answer McCutcheon's two questions "Was it done well?" and "Was it worth doing?" (McCutcheon, 1976). We might also ponder the question of "If it is not worth doing, is it worth doing well?" We must here deal with the value stance of the critic and the teacher. There is no such thing as "value-free" evaluation as I understand it. The researcher holds values as does the teacher. If, however, I openly reveal my value stance on initial contact with the teacher, the teacher might adjust

his or her teaching to match my stance. Alternatively, if I know the teacher's rationale at the beginning of the study, I might try to evaluate in light of that stated rationale rather than in terms of the operationalized goals that function in the classroom. I maintain that, up to a certain point, the educational critic can, and must, see and use the value assumptions of the class being criticized; at the same time, while respecting those assumptions, the critic has the right and the obligation to disagree with the teacher, especially if she believes the assumptions as they are put into operation may engender educational consequences which she sees as deleterious.

As an example of evaluation of Mr. Jewel's class I stated the following:

> students are thinking about what they are doing as art historians. Students are learning how to learn art history, learning how to use libraries, learning how to express themselves clearly, expressively, and humorously. Goodlad points out that learning how to learn may be one of the most important things a youngster can gain from school (Goodlad, 1976). In addition to learning how to learn, students are thinking about the process of thinking. Flavell terms this process--the thinking about thinking--"metacognition" (Flavell, 1977). It is not often youngsters are aware of the thinking process in classrooms, but here they are. The questions are--How do you think about art history? and what questions are important to ask about art history? The students may forget the answers, but hopefully they will retain the questions.

In addition to influencing evaluation, the critic's values alsc influence any prescriptive judgments she may make. Prescription adds a third question that might be answered in educational criticism: "How could it be done better?" In the study I report today, I felt I should prescribe, and these prescriptions took two forms. The first kind intended to help the teacher better achieve the goals he had set for himself. So for Mr. Jewel I wrote a short essay on "Looking and Seeing." The second kind of prescription may help a teacher consider goals he had not previously considered.

Today I have attempted to show how educational criticism copes with the phenomena of the teaching-learning process. These examples are part of a 30 page educational criticism which reads more like a novel than a journal article. It has been reported to me that educational criticism presents a readable, descriptive, interpretive, and evaluative portrayal of classroom life, something which we need in art education.

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